

The Many Faces of Roy

The Manifold Faces of Roy

As all Sherlock Holmes aficionados know, dogs play a leading role in a variety number of Canonical stories – it is part of what Emma Mason has called their ‘hudo-graphical reality’,¹ the way that the ongoing process of crime solving is rooted in the Great Detective’s relationship with dogs, and/or his canine attributes. For instance, Holmes himself is regularly depicted as displaying a canine-like sensibility, being described as (for just a few examples) the ‘well-trained foxhound’ of *A Study in Scarlet*, the ‘sleuth-hound’ of ‘The Red-Headed League,’ or the ‘dog with gleaming eyes and straining muscles’ of ‘The Bruce-Partington Plans’.² Furthermore, dogs also feature as characters, at times being utilised to create in some stories; some provide pathos (such as with the euthanasia of the sick animal in *A Study in Scarlet*, or the creature that dies of grief in ‘The Lion’s Mane’), or as embodiments of; others embody faithfulness, notably ‘Toby’ in *The Sign of Four* and ‘Pompey’ in ‘The Missing Three Quarter’, or else serving as an indicator of; and others still indicate human character — such as in the way allegations of animal cruelty create a sense of dark foreboding in relation to Sir Eustace Brackenstall, and how the responses, or the behaviour of ‘little Carlo’ the spaniel in ‘The Sussex Vampire’ imply shapes the reader’s view of Mrs Ferguson’s sinister hidden depths. Ferguson. On other occasions, dogs actually become part of the crime-solving process itself (‘Toby’) or else contribute to an eventual participate in narrative retribution, hence *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the spaniel in ‘The Shoscombe Old Place’, the non-barking dog in ‘The Silver Blaze’, the fearsome ‘Carlo’ the mastiff in ‘The Copper Beeches’, and the wolf-hound ‘Roy’ in ‘The Creeping Man’.

The latter is interesting in that he contributes to the narrative in more than one way, embodying positive qualities and characteristics, revealing the underlying character of Presbury, and bringing about the Professor’s eventual comeuppance. And yet, despite the

nuances of this portrayal much of the scholarly work about 'Roy' has focused solely on the matter of his breeding, with Inman (despite acknowledging him being 'a significant factor in enabling Holmes to unravel the "Creeping Man" conundrum'³) mostly examining the question as to whether 'Roy' was an Irish or a Russian wolfhound. And Powis hones in on whether there is any evidence that shows whether 'Roy' 'was an Alsatian or a real wolf-hound'.⁴

When I began work on a new annotated edition of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's handwritten manuscript of 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man',⁵ my sense of 'Roy' was thus that he was something of a poor relation amongst Canonical canines. Obviously he has an important narrative function in the story, but there was little that was remarkable about him – and indeed for me he has always seemed just a little *too* similar to Jephro Rucastle's hound in 'The Copper Beeches'. However, when working on the manuscript it became evident almost immediately that 'Roy' had more to him than I had previously thought, and that he had in fact been the subject of significant and notable revisions by Conan Doyle. In particular, the author had chosen to radically revise his initial conception of 'Roy', to the extent that by the time the manuscript was finished and submitted to the publisher the dog had not only changed identity, but had also secured an enhanced position within the narrative as a whole.

The evidence for this conclusion begins on page four of Doyle's handwritten draft; this is the point in the tale where the reader is first introduced to what is described as Professor Presbury's 'faithful old spaniel'. Now, at once readers who are familiar with the story will have noticed the anomaly. *Spaniel*. 'Roy' is, at this point, a *spaniel*. Which, one can only speculate, must at that time have seemed perfectly appropriate to Doyle – he only required the dog of the story to show out-of-character aggression towards his master, Professor Presbury, and therein to suggest to the reader that this man had somehow undergone a fundamental personality change. And yet, the manuscript then shows that this first version of Presbury's companion was crossed out, and in its place Doyle writes the details of a new version of 'Roy' – the larger, more physically-imposing wolf-hound with which most readers of 'The Creeping Man' are familiar. So, there must have been something about the initial depiction of 'Roy' that needed changing, and brought about a change of heart as to the precise role 'Roy' would play in the narrative. And it

must have been relatively significant, because Conan Doyle was not a man overly concerned with the minutiae of his Holmes stories, especially during his later years.

All of which leads towards the inference that when Doyle wrote the first version of the dog he could not have firmly decided what would happen at the conclusion of the story; specifically, he could not yet have decided that 'Roy' would mount a life-threatening attack on his master, thus delivering his own form of moral retribution. Because surely if he *had* planned things that far ahead, and had that in mind when he wrote the opening descriptions of 'Roy' in his manuscript, he would have decided that a modest-sized spaniel was entirely unsuitable for the role. Which suggests that, at some point after handwriting his first version of the story, Conan Doyle crystallised his plans for the denouement of the story, and in so doing realised that his loyal spaniel was not going to be up to the job he had in mind. Thus he struck out the earlier description and replaced it with a different 'Roy' – no longer the playful little companion, but instead a more intimidating, fiercer, wolf-hound. And 'Roy 2.0' was in size and stature much more appropriate as the would-be-killer of his master, and allows Doyle to draw on a heightened sense of Gothic terror in the way he had previously done with another dog that viciously attacked its own master in 'The Copper Beeches'.

This surmise about Doyle's change of heart is bolstered by the contents of a newspaper article that appeared in Conan Doyle's local newspaper, the *Crowborough Weekly*, less than a decade before he wrote 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man'. On 26th April 1913, under the heading 'Sherlock Wins',⁶ readers of the paper were treated to an account of Doyle's appearance in court to defend his family dog against an accusation that he had killed a farmer's sheep, less than a mile from his Sussex home. What is interesting is not only that the name of this dog was also 'Roy' (though it was a collie rather than a spaniel or a wolf-hound), but also that the author's courtroom rebuttal of the charges against his pet chime with his later depiction of *Roy-the-spaniel* in the manuscript of 'The Creeping Man'. For Conan Doyle made two key assertions in his defence of his own 'Roy'; that his dog was 'physically incapable' of attacking sheep in the fashion suggested, and that the animal's personality, which he affectionately lauds as 'of the gentlest type', would in any case have made such aggressive behaviour unfeasible. It is unlikely, one would have thought, that Doyle would have argued that

a collie was a breed physically incapable of assaulting sheep and then less than a decade later would have thought it entirely credible to depict a spaniel as capable of nearly killing a man. Unless, of course, the spaniel was not originally intended to do so.

It is quite possible that at least part of the motivation for Conan Doyle's passionate legal defence of his own collie 'Roy' was to protect the reputation of his family. Bearing in mind he would later write that 'a dog reflects the family life...Snarling people have snarling dogs, dangerous people have dangerous ones',⁷ in his own mind there may well have been some guilt-by-association if his own family pet had been judged responsible for unprovoked fatal attacks on other animals. Nevertheless, there is still viable evidence to support the contention that when Doyle originally wrote the first parts of the story and introduced 'Roy' to the reader, he had not decided the ending of the story. Thus it seemed appropriate to reward the dog in 'The Creeping Man' with the very same name as his own much-loved pet; almost as if this fictional 'Roy' was a form of posthumous tribute to the dog of his past. But then, things changed. Doyle's desire to amplify the Gothic drama of the ending necessitated a new 'Roy', one better equipped to take centre stage and deliver the necessary form of retribution to the errant Professor. So, the original manuscript was revised; and subsequent readers were never to be perplexed by the curious notion of a *spaniel* in the role of that 'savage creature [that] had him fairly by the throat...fangs bitten deep'.⁸

The latter is particularly interesting because he takes his place within multiple categories; he is faithful, he is part of the way Conan Doyle defines the character of Professor Presbury, in that his sudden aggression towards him is indicative of changes in the man himself, and in addition at the end of the story 'Roy' plays a retributive role in the Professor's punishment. And yet, despite the nuances of this portrayal much of the scholarly work that focuses on him is confined to questions of breeding. Inman acknowledges the dog's role as 'a significant factor in enabling Holmes to unravel the "Creeping Man" conundrum'⁹ but then goes on to focus solely on the question as to whether he is an Irish or a Russian wolfhound (ultimately concluding that the former is more likely). And when 'Roy' is considered by Powis it is in terms of whether there is any evidence that shows whether Roy 'was an Alsatian or a real wolf-hound'.¹⁰

If I'm honest, when I began work preparing a new annotated edition of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original handwritten manuscript of 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man',¹¹ my sense of 'Roy' was that he was a poor relation amongst all the Canonical canines. Obviously he has an important narrative function, but (it seemed to me then) in a way entirely in keeping with Conan Doyle's use of dogs within other, earlier Holmes adventures. However, when confronted with the handwritten manuscript it became evident almost immediately that 'Roy' had been the subject of significant and notable revision by the author. Despite his reputation for making very few amendments to his work and at times being a little too hasty in putting his stories together, the manuscript contains evidence of a more diligent, more thoughtful process than might have been expected, and one of the key areas of the story that Doyle appears to have been concerned with was the nature of the dog in the story. In particular, he ended up radically revising his initial conception of 'Roy', and by the time the manuscript was finished and submitted to the publisher this specific dog had been rewarded with a much enhanced position within the narrative.

The evidence for this begins on page four of Doyle's handwritten draft; this is the point in the tale where the reader is first introduced to what is described as Professor Presbury's 'faithful old spaniel'. Now, already readers familiar with the story will have noticed an anomaly. *Spaniel*. 'Roy' is at this point, a *spaniel*. Which must at the time have seemed perfectly appropriate - Doyle is trying to use the increasingly and unusually aggressive behaviour of Professor Presbury's dog as a barometer of the personality change this man is undergoing, and as such the breed of dog was not really important. And yet, the manuscript then shows that the description of this version of Presbury's loyal companion were then crossed out, and in their place Doyle writes the details of the next version of 'Roy' - this time the wolf-hound with which most readers of 'The Creeping Man' are familiar.

Obviously the most pressing question at this point is 'why?' What was it about the initial depiction of 'Roy' that Conan Doyle decided to change? And why did he bother to make this change at all when it was easier to leave things as they were, at a time when he showed a general antipathy towards his Sherlock Holmes stories at this point of his career, if he did not view it as relatively important? And as soon as we ask these questions then it becomes pretty

clear that at some point in his writing process he must have had a change of heart as to the precise role 'Roy' would play in the narrative. It seems likely that at the time he described the first version of the dog, he had not firmly decided what would happen at the conclusion of the story – specifically, he had not yet decided that 'Roy' would be the one who mounted a life-threatening attack on his master the Professor, thus delivering a form of moral retribution. Because surely if he *had* planned things that far ahead, and had that in mind when he wrote the opening descriptions of 'Roy', is it not likely that he would have decided that this particular dog could never be a modest-sized spaniel?

Which suggests that, at some point after hand-writing his first version of the story, Conan Doyle crystallised his plans for the denouement of the story, and in doing so he realised that his loyal spaniel just was not going to be up to the job he had in mind for him. This has to be the motivation for striking out the earlier details and replacing them with a different 'Roy' – no longer the playful little companion, but instead a much larger, and potentially fiercer, wolf-hound. 'Roy 2.0' is in size and stature more appropriate as the would-be-killer of his master, and in terms of the overall drama and tension of the story provides a heightened Gothicism that is much more on the lines of other Gothic dogs in the Canon, such as the mastiff 'Carlo' in 'The Copper Beeches', who as it happens also attacks his own master.

This surmise is strengthened by a newspaper article that appeared in Conan Doyle's local newspaper, the *Crowborough Weekly*, less than a decade before he wrote 'The Creeping Man'. For, on 26th April 1913, under the heading 'Sherlock Wins',¹² readers of the paper were treated to an account of the author's appearance in court in response to an accusation that his family dog killed a farmer's sheep less than a mile from his Sussex home. What is particularly interesting, in relation to what Doyle later wrote in 'The Creeping Man', was that not only was the name of this dog also 'Roy' (though a collie rather than a spaniel or a wolf-hound), but also that the author's passionate defence of his own animal made clear that as far as he was concerned this particular dog was 'physically incapable' of attacking sheep in this way; further, he affectionately lauds the animal for its character, which is said to be 'of the gentlest type'. Now, this tells us two relevant things; first, it is inconceivable that Doyle would have believed that a collie was physically incapable of assaulting sheep and less than a decade later would

have thought a spaniel capable of nearly killing a man. As such, when he originally conceived of 'Roy' he could not have been thinking at the time that that was to be his fate at the end of the story. Second, it is equally hard to conceive that in Doyle's own mind, the decision to give the dog in 'The Creeping Man' the very same name as his own much-loved pet was coincidental, and was rather a form of posthumous tribute growing out of his positive, warmly associations with the 'Roy' of his past; in the light of which, there is surely little chance he could have attributed a name so associated with comforting memories from the past to a dog conceived from the outset to be a Nemesis-like bringer of violent canine justice?

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¹ Emma Mason, 'Dogs, detectives and the famous Sherlock Holmes,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Volume 11, Number 3, pp. 289-300 (291)

² There are many other articles that make this their focus, stretching back at least as far as Bridgeman's 'Horses and Hounds' and Stockler and Brodie's 'The Problem of the Dog That Wasn't' – both to be found in *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Summer 1969, 9(2).

³ Charles G. Inman, 'Roy: Russian or Irish?' *The Baker Street Journal*, Volume 43, Number 1 (March 1993), pp. pp. 7-8 (7). In the June 1993 edition of the journal both Sondra D. Koznin and J. R. Dunlap offer further contributions to this debate.

⁴ Earl of Powis, 'Sherlock Holmes and Dogs,' *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Volume 15, Number 1 (Winter 1980), pp. 5-7 (7)

⁵ For further details of the publication itself, see

<http://www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle/TheCreepingMan>

⁶ For the full article see <https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php?title=File:The-new-york-times-1913-05-04-part3-p3-sherlock-holmes-wins.jpg>. Accessed 14th February 2017.

⁷ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 51

⁸ Conan Doyle, 'The Creeping Man,' p. 68

⁹ Charles G. Inman, 'Roy: Russian or Irish?' *The Baker Street Journal*, Volume 43, Number 1 (March 1993), pp. pp. 7-8 (7). In the June 1993 edition of the journal both Sondra D. Koznin and J. R. Dunlap offer further contributions to this debate.

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